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SUBJECT: Cameroon: AU Verdict Rejects Secessionism, Vindicates
Anglophones

Refs: (A) Yaounde 841, (B) Yaounde 581

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A recent African Union decision dismissed anglophone Cameroonian secessionism while acknowledging serious human rights violations committed against secessionist anglophones by the government of Cameroon. Though a blow to the cause of anglophone independence, the AU's findings will be used by Cameroonians seeking asylum in the U.S. to support their cases. Post acknowledges that grave human rights violations have occurred in the past, but notes that reports of abuses in recent years have consisted primarily of detentions for convening illegal meetings.
END SUMMARY.

AU Acknowledges Abuses While Dismissing Secession

¶2. (U) A 2003 complaint with the African Union (AU) alleged numerous human rights violations by the Government of Cameroon against some political activists from the anglophone regions (what they termed "The Southern Cameroons"). This complaint by members of the secessionist Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) and the Southern Cameroons Peoples' Organization (SCAPO), further sought recognition of anglophone Cameroon's right to self-rule. The AU's Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights pronounced a verdict earlier this year, with the results made public last month.

¶3. (U) The AU's commission found that the Government of Cameroon violated individual rights and those of the anglophone Cameroonian people. The violations cited include:

- Subjecting separatist prisoners to "cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment," including amputation, torture, and denial of medical treatment.
- Discrimination against anglophone commerce by forcing businesses to register nationally only in French.
- Transporting anglophone prisoners to Francophone areas for trials or military tribunals, conducted in French without interpreter.

It also, however, called upon the SCNC and SCAPO "to abandon secessionism" and to address their grievances as legitimate political parties within the Cameroonian system. The AU also recommended that the government of Cameroon correct continuing abuses.

¶4. (U) State-controlled media has spun the AU verdict heavily in the government's favor. Official and sympathetic press focused exclusively on the denial of the complaint's secessionist claims. While anglophone press highlighted the findings of abuse, the overwhelming sentiment remained that the verdict favored the government.

A Blow to Separatists; A Tool for Asylum Seekers

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15. (SBU) Comment: The SCNC is illegal, with a history of committing violence. The prospect that they or SCAPO would join mainstream Cameroonian politics is highly unlikely in the short term. Their advocacy for secessionism, incompatible with status as a legal political party in Cameroon, is their primary differentiation from other opposition groups. Nevertheless, they face aging leadership, dwindling membership rolls, and the loss of legal avenues in the international arena. Individuals sympathetic to anglophone grievances will be increasingly motivated to abandon such groups and address the issues from within the Cameroonian political process as the AU suggests.

16. (SBU) Most Cameroonians claiming asylum in the United States are anglophones citing persecution for membership in groups such as the SCNC. Though the AU's verdict is based on a six year old complaint it still cites both past and continuing abuses. Post has reported that there is little recent evidence of such oppression (refs A and B). Despite this, Cameroonian anglophones claiming asylum in the U.S. will likely use the AU's verdict as support for claims of torture, arrest and inhumane treatment. End comment.

GARVEY